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Drafted by: EA/K:FCAshley:jcm
Control No. I47-1214 11/19/80
Clearances: EA/K:RGRich EA:SPayne H:WItoh

P800155-0332

November 21, 1980

Dear Senator Matsunaga:

I am replying to your inquiry of October 30, enclosing a letter from Edward A. Shields and others who expressed concern over the current situation in South Korea. Mr. Shields raised in particular the trial and sentencing of opposition leader Kim Dae Jung and the jailing of a friend, Professor Kim Dae Jin.

We share their concerns about the course of political development in Korea and about the treatment of political prisoners. We have repeatedly made these concerns known to senior levels of the Korean leadership and will continue to do so.

The United States Government has followed the trial of Mr. Kim Dae Jung with intense interest and deep concern. The Government of the Republic of Korea is fully aware of our views. We obviously have strong feelings about the harsh verdict which has been handed down. Nevertheless, since the case is in the process of review by the Supreme Court, we are not commenting on the matter at this time.

The former Dean of Students at Chonnam University, Professor Kim Dae Jin, was reportedly tried in October with 174 others in Kwangju in connection with the violent incident in that city in May, but is now free. While our Embassy has not talked with Professor Kim personally, he is apparently among the group of Koreans who received suspended or "non-executed" sentences. We do not know the nature of the original charges levied against him.

Despite this difficult period of transition in Korea, we are confident that the good sense and intelligence of the Korean people will enable them to resolve their current problems and to continue to build a prosperous Korea.

Sincerely,

J. Brian Atwood
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

Enclosure:

Correspondence Returned.

The Honorable
Spark Matsunaga,
United States Senate.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
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